

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) has introduced legislation that would create a Farm to School grant program to fight childhood obesity and support local farmers. The Child Nutrition Act is up for reauthorization this year, and Holt – a member of the House Committee on Education and Labor – is working to improve how food is sourced for the 31 million children that eat at school five days a week, 180 days a year.

“Farm to school programs exemplify the best use of federal school lunch dollars,” Holt said. “This is a rare opportunity for a win-win solution— a program to ensure our children get the best quality food at school, help foster local farm job growth, and create local economic growth.”

Video of Holt talking about the legislation with school nutrition experts can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bs52sHtZRkU>

The Farm to School Improvements Act (H.R. 4710) would establish a competitive grant and technical assistance program to increase the use of local foods from small and medium sized farms in schools. The grant funds also would improve the relationships between schools and local food providers. The legislation would provide \$10 million in mandatory funding each year for the duration of the program and require that grant recipients provide a local match to ensure serious commitment to the project.

Farm to School programs have shown that locally and regionally produced food can be provided efficiently from nearby producers if there is a good distribution system. The grants authorized by this legislation would provide communities the seed money they need to develop robust, economically-sustainable programs linking agricultural producers with schools.

“This seed funding could not come at a better time as the interest and need for Farm to School programs is at an all time high,” said Marion Kalb, co-Director of the National Farm to School Network. “HR 4710 will create competitive, one-time grants that can be used to develop vendor relationships with nearby farmers, plan seasonal menus and promotional materials, start a school garden, or develop hands-on nutrition education.”

Farm to School programs can:

- Strengthen children's and communities' knowledge about, and attitudes toward, agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment.
- Increase children's participation in the school meals program and consumption of fruits and vegetables, improving childhood nutrition, reducing hunger, and preventing obesity and obesity-related diseases.
- Benefit school food budgets, after start-up, if planning and menu choices are made consistent with seasonal availability of fresh and minimally processed whole foods.
- Support economic development across numerous sectors and promote job creation.
- Increase market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food manufacturers.
- Decrease the distance between producers and consumers of fresh agricultural products, thus promoting food security while reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and reliance on oil.

"In these challenging fiscal times, every dollar we spend must not only meet immediate needs but also make lasting improvements for the future," Holt added. "Because school food programs currently provide more than half the daily calories for many children, it is vital that these calories are healthy ones. Farm to school programs increase the availability of fresh and locally grown food that improve our children's daily nutrition and can lead to permanent improvements in their diets and productivity and can reduce future health care costs associated with obesity by billions of dollars."